

THREE ADDITIONAL TYPES OF WOMERAH OR
"THROWING-STICK."

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(Plate XIV.)

I am indebted to Mr. Harry Stockdale for an opportunity of describing three types of Womerah, additions to those already figured in the Proceedings of this Society.

It will be remembered that I described a rigid lath-like weapon from Agate Creek, a tributary of the Gilbert River, north-eastern Australia,* devoid of any transversely flattened surface for a spear rest. At the hinder end of this womerah was mounted the usual spear-peg, and at the fore end two pieces of *Melo* shell adpressed together.

The first of the three weapons now to be described corresponds in shape, thickness, rigidity, and position of the spear-peg with the Agate Creek throwing-stick, but in place of the pieces of adpressed shell at the proximal end is another peg, formed of two pieces of flattened wood, one placed on either side of the stick, and held in position against its sides by black gum-cement. At the hinder end there is only just sufficient cement to hold the spear-peg in its place, but the fore or proximal end of the weapon has been wrapped round with some kind of fabric and the cement smeared over its surface for a space of four inches, as well as enveloping the additional double peg. The surface of the cement and fabric is much roughened, as if some other foreign body had been wrenched off. It may be that the surface of the gum-cement has merely peeled off or been removed by fracture, or, on the

* P.L.S.N.S.W. 1891, v. (2), p. 701.

other hand, there is the possibility that portions of shell were attached at this end also, in addition to the double peg. Which-ever it may have been, the presence of the latter indicates at least a varietal departure from the lath-like weapon of Agate Creek already described. In the absence of the native name of this weapon it may be known as the "Fore and Aft Womerah."

The length of this womerah is three feet one inch, the width at the centre two inches, and at either end one and three-eighths inches, showing a slight degree of taper towards the extremities. The wood is extremely close, hard, and dark-coloured. Several indentations and chippings of the upper edge show this to be an old weapon that has seen good service in the hands of its sable possessor.

The second type is much shorter, thicker, and slightly curved. The proximal or fore end is simply rounded off, and is a good deal hand-stained from frequent use. The spear-peg at the distal termination is long, very obliquely set, and held in position by twine, or even perhaps sinews, and a very coarse kind of gum-cement. The length of this womerah is two feet one and a half inches long across the curve, with a uniform width of one and two-eighths inches, except at the proximal end, where it broadens somewhat, and becomes at the distal end flat, top and bottom, apparently to give a good abutment for the spear-peg. This womerah is very handy and must have been effective, giving one the idea of a much more serviceable and powerful weapon than those previously described.

The late R. Brough Smyth figures* a number of womerahs with blunt or semi-rounded proximal ends, but they are all broad-bladed weapons. One,† however, is more akin to that now under description; at the same time, the spear-peg is cut out of the same piece of wood as the womerah shaft itself, and there is a slight rise in the centre of the latter to form a bridge or support for the spear. This will be more particularly referred to in the next to be described.

* Aborigines of Victoria, 1878, i. p. 309, f. 88-92.

† Aborigines of Victoria, 1878, i. p. 310, f. 94.

It would be interesting to ascertain how far south along the eastern coast shell-mounted womerachs extend. We know that they have been observed as low as the Herbert River, off Hinchinbrook Island, but White mentions in his "Journal of a Voyage to N. S. Wales"* that our Botany Bay natives "had a stick, with a shell at the end, used by them in throwing their weapons." It is hardly likely that this could be a womerah after the type of the *Melo*-mounted weapon, but was more probably only a piece of shell placed at the extreme end and used as a scraper, after the manner of some of the womerachs from Western Australia and elsewhere.

The third womerah is of an essentially different type both in shape and mounting. It consists of a long thin heavy stick, with the usual spear peg at the distal end, but destitute of any gum-cement or supplementary object at the proximal. It is much thicker than either modification of the Lath-like Womerach. The upper edge rises excentrically into a bridge, evidently for the support of the spear as foreshadowed in Smyth's illustration previously referred to. Irrespective of the bridge, the womerah tapers from the distal to the proximal end, the latter terminating in an obtuse point. The spear-peg is small, short, very obliquely set, and fixed on with a semi-transparent rosin-like gum, having the appearance of gum-arabic and quite different from the ordinary gum-cement, and studded with the red and black-tipped seeds of *Abrus precatorius*.

This womerah is two feet eight inches long, the breadth at the proximal end being seven-eighths, at the centre one inch and five-eighths, and at the distal end one and one-eighth inches respectively. It is relatively heavier in comparison to its size than either of the two other weapons now described.

The three weapons were obtained by Mr. Harry Stockdale in the Cape York Peninsula, fifty miles south of the Cape.

* 4to, London, 1790.